

## **Donald Stafford Palmer**

By Don and DeAnn Palmer

My name is Donald Stafford Palmer, I served in the United States Air Force from January 1956 to September 1959.

I was born in Williston, North Dakota, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1936. I am the son of Elbert Henry Palmer and Susie Amanda Morkve Palmer. I have three sisters: Bernice, Betty, and Alice.

We loved our home in Williston, however it was always cold. My father, being a great handy man, made cement tulips to adorn our sidewalk. He painted them various colors to lively up the front yard. (Last time we visited, there were still there). Great memories growing up there.



In 1946 my father was heavily involved in raising mink. There was a great market for the pelts at that time however; the feed was not easily assessable and producing it by yourself was not practical or profitable. After a lot of consideration, my parents decided to come to Utah where there was a mink cooperative that produced the feed they needed. They chose to live in Lehi. They purchased five acres located about 380 East and 400 North. A lot of their property was later purchased by the state, to make the overpass road going to Lehi High School.

I was 10 years old when we moved to Lehi, Utah and I wondered what it would be like and if I would be accepted. I remember being the only non LDS boy in the school. However, everyone treated me well and friends were quickly made and friendships have lasted throughout our lives.

I loved my school years in Lehi. I was fortunate enough to play on the basketball, football and baseball teams and served as a Student Body Officer. I had a great time in school and enjoyed my teachers and remember the fun filled days. I especially remember Mr. E.N. Pearson, my wood shop teacher. I learned so much from him and decided to become a industrial arts teacher also.

I remember the fun times I had in my senior year at Lehi High. Each High School in the district had a traveling assembly. In my senior year I had the opportunity to be the MC for the assembly and we had the opportunity to present it to every school in the region. It was great fun, we were able to meet many kids in other schools and we thought life was wonderful!

I graduated from Lehi High School in 1954. I decided to attend Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Many of my friends decided to attend there also. Glade Peterson, Lewis Berry, Cary Peterson, Gary Evans. Great friends. When we came home or a weekend, we would car pool together. Lewis Berry's mother would send a delicious caramel cake with us to eat when we returned to our apartment. It rarely made it there. It was so good; we couldn't wait to eat it. I was working toward a degree in history, education, and administration.

While I loved my time at college and was having great fun, however; I also felt the need to do something else. My father has served in the Army during world war! Many relatives served valiantly during their lives and I felt that maybe that was something I should do. I always had a love for our country, my parents made sure of that, and I began to think I needed to grow up a little. By the end of my 5<sup>th</sup> quarter of school, I made my decision. I went home and talked it over with my parents. I wanted to join the Air Force. With their consent and blessing I left Utah State University behind me and went to the "Fort Douglas Enlistment Center" in Salt Lake City. I enlisted in the Air Force for four years. I felt it was something I needed to do.

Within a few days—I met up with my assigned group, got on a train headed to "Parks Air Force Base" near Oakland, California. The airmen I was with was all from Utah or Idaho. It didn't take long on the train before I wondered "what did I get myself into?" No more fun - forever!

It was a very L O N G ride to California. Seriously though, there was also a sense of pride and I still knew I was doing the right thing. Yes, I was a little worried, a little insecure and a little scared—but— I was doing the right thing.

I was lucky to be with this great group of young men for a few weeks. Boot camp is a training place - that's it. It seemed like it rained every day during our training. Enough that many of the men became ill. I happened to be one of them. I came down with a good case of pneumonia. I was sent to the base hospital and was there for some time.

I remember well the orderly, nick named the vampire. Let's just say, he wasn't the best trained, or maybe not the most talented in obtaining blood samples, which we had at once a day. We dreaded his visit more than our illness. Several attempts to "find a good vein" was not uncommon, and he was not gentle, therefore the nickname. One day during the vampire visit, I heard a big thump next to me. My friend in the next bed passed out and hit the floor. (Probably trying to escape) Anyway it was quite a teasing point from then on.

Because I was detained in the hospital, I was not allowed to ship out with my original group of airmen. I was really sad about that, they were great guys and we got along really well. By the time I was released I was attached to another group to finish my training. This was not so good. There were to divisions among them. One was all the men from Watts, California. They were big and black and mean. The other part were Scandinavians from Minneapolis, Minnesota also big, white and just as tough. I did not fit into either group.

There were fights in the Latrine every night, I guess it was their nightly entertainment. All I could do was pull the covers over my head and never took sides in the confrontations. They broke that latrine more than once, they were always in trouble. I was happy just to get through that time. I was excited when I received my orders. I was soon on my way to my assigned base. AMARILLO, TEXAS AIR FORCE BASE.

I boarded a C-47 plane. It was a rickety old thing. I wondered if it was going to make it. It took a full day to get to Texas. We left California and proceeded to Winslow, Arizona. We got off the plane there and I remember how bleak it was. There was nothing but sagebrush and tumbleweeds. They gave us something to eat and drink and loaded us back on the plane for the remainder of the trip.

When we got to Amarillo they assigned us our barracks. I remember it was night and it seemed like there was about ½ inch of dirt on the bed. That was an experience I've just never forgot. We shook off the dust and went to bed. The next morning we started our training. For me, it was mechanics. That was the area I tested high in. I went to work on F-86 D planes. They were single engine jet fighters, with a radar nose. The F-86 D plane looked like it had a nose on it, but that area was filled with the radar equipment.

While attending training classes, they looked into my record and saw I had attended college and was interested in becoming a teacher. An officer approached me and said they needed some help over in the B47 school. They were retraining airmen into the mechanics field. He asked me if I was interested in helping with that. I said "sure". I was happy about the offer as I was under orders to be sent to Japan to be a crew chief working on single engine jets. I was happy to stay in Amarillo. I did not have a lot of training on the B47 up to that time, but I had to learn it fast.

They sent me to bomber school and gave me a 13 day crash course on injection seats, fuel systems, hydraulic systems, you name it and I had to do it.

At the time I was an airman, not an officer. When I started my new assignment, I found out I was teaching college graduates and civilian employees with many years' experience. I was teaching fourteen different systems on the B-47, which was a lot of fun and I learned a lot. Everyone treated me great and if I ever needed help they would come and assist me. It was an experience for a YOUNG airman to be teaching Master Sergeants and Technical Sergeants about the B-47 airplanes and the maintenance that needed to be done on them.

Some funny things happened while serving in Amarillo. One day as we were out for Armed Services day, the traditional "fly over's were scheduled and the band was playing, everyone was happy. All the airmen were standing at attention, waiting for the "pass and review". Some pilots came in on some F-84's, which were just like a stove pipe with wings on it. It is an old. Old, jet, left over after the Korean war. Well, two of them came in just perfect and taxied around to the assigned spot. Here comes the third pilot and were all standing there watching. He goes right off the end of the runway and snags the security fence that guards the base from route 66, the national highway. He drags this fence, until it's finally too heavy and he comes to a stop. Then you see this canopy jettisons and flies off and goes sailing through the air. The pilot jumps out and runs about fifty yards, stops and looks at the plane. Of course we're at attention and trying to maintain some decorum in the ranks, but it just wasn't possible. We were all laughing so hard. I'll never forget that Officer running out there looking at his jet with all the fence hanging off the wings. I bet someone got reprimanded for that.

Another time we were on parade. I hated parades and standing for hours. I think it was another Armed Services parade. I must have borrowed somebody's hat for some reason I can't remember. As we were standing at attention the officer came by, looked at me and said "you don't look right Airman. What hat have you got on?" I said "I got the best hat I could find" "that hat is too small and it sticks up there and puts his hands up past his ears - It's terrible" he said, "come with me, fall out" So I went over around the corner of the hanger and He said "We don't need you today so go home" I was so happy I didn't have to stand out on the tarmac for a

half day or more. It was a good choice.

While on leave in 1956, I met a beautiful girl (on a blind date). Helen DeAnn Palmer. We dated and corresponded when I returned to Texas. We decided to get married upon my next leave in 1957. We were married on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1957 in Lindon, Utah. We stayed in Salt Lake for our one night honeymoon and the next morning went to her parents home to gather up our gifts and belongings. DeAnn seemed to think we had more time, at least a day or two, but to her surprise, and dismay, we were headed to Amarillo that day. She cried most of the way. We had a old Ford car and we always wondered it is was really going to get us all the way to Texas.

Two young people, far away. One car, which I had to use to get to the base. We lived on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of a home. It was owned by two older ladies, they lived on the first floor. They were Christian Scientists and true believers. However one of them was quite ill and would cry all day when her sister left her alone. Since they did not believe in Doctors, there was nothing DeAnn could do to help her. It was very interesting.

We did not make much money during our stay in the Service. DeAnn received \$91.30 and I got some where around \$50.00 every two weeks. We hocked my Elgin watch so many times just to make it through the month. DeAnn washed my fatigues and shirts in the tub and ironed them perfectly. We could not afford to have them sent to the cleaners. It was very difficult. We learned to depend on each other and go without many things. But we were no different than most of the others there. We had to pull together which is a good thing for young married couples. We would not want to do it again though, but we did it and made it through. It was quite an experience. We found out that we were going to have a baby and were happy but DeAnn was very sick and being alone did not help.

They closed B-47 school down around late in the Fall of 1958 as I remember. I received orders to report to the Mc Connell, S-A-C base in Wichita, Kansas. We loaded up our little clunker car and headed for Wichita. There we found a cute little apartment located on top of a garage. The roads in our area were rec brick. It was really beautiful, in a nice neighborhood. DeAnn was still having problems.

This was a "Strategic Air Command- base. Therefore, we did not know when we left the house in the morning if we would be home at 5 pm or 7 pm or not at all that night and we were not allowed to make any calls. This was hard on DeAnn, she was alone a lot of the time.

I was assigned to the flight line again, doing engine repairs etc. We did all types of stuff out there and I had to work a lot at night, it was spooky for DeAnn.

There was also some down time at the base. When working the day shift, we would gather at noon to play volleyball in the hanger. There were six bombers in the hanger. The bombers had a canopy like a fighter would have. The canopy opened upward like a hinge. One particular day all six were lined up in the hanger. We still had plenty room to play volley ball. Somehow the ball got spiked too hard, it hit the floor, bounced up and hit the handle of the Emergency water lever which opens up all water spouts in the hanger. We could hear the gears grinding and just looked at each other and saw the water going through the canopy and down the ladder that was

used to get into the airplane. It looked like we were standing in six inches of water. Immediately it looked like Niagara Falls. The airplanes were just soaked. OH MAN did we get in trouble. That ended the volleyball in the hanger. It's a wonder we all survived.

I had made two really good friends, Bill Moeller and Dale Petersen. Bill had a gift of gab and could talk his way into anything. He had given a plush job of overseer of the Officer's swimming pool. They were L.D.S and good guys. Bill asked me if would like to work at the pool - right? He pulled some strings and there I was - at the pool. This was in 1959. My last summer in the Air Force. We had a great time.

Although I did not serve in war time. I did not carry a gun nor did I save any lives. I do know the work that I did kept pilot's safe and we were ready and able to be activated if necessary. I am proud to have been in the Air Force. I love this country. I know it was founded under the inspiration of our Heavenly Father. It is my hope that everyone will pray for the safety and freedom of this great nation. THE GREATEST NATION IN THE WORLD !

On the base there were designated days for the airmen to see the doctors and days for the family members to be seen. On February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1958 DeAnn started to have problems. It was a day that was primarily for the servicemen. When we got to the hospital we had **to** wait. DeAnn thought she could wait a little longer, but as luck would have it. Our little son was born far too early, and only lived for a few moments. DeAnn was not doing very well and did not get to see our little son. It was very sad, it was hard for us. It was also sad for our Doctor that could not save his life. He was just too small, about 2 1/4 lbs. Today, with all the modern techniques we have available and the great doctors, our little son could have made it, However, there is another part to this story.

As I was not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I did not know who to call for help. I was lost, I didn't know what to do or where to begin. DeAnn was always faithful in the gospel and though she could not help, told me who to call. It was President T. Bowring Woodbury, President of the Central States Mission and the Branch President: Brother Bryant. They were wonderful. They helped me with everything including the grave side service. DeAnn was not able to attend, she was still in the hospital. It was very difficult and sad for her - and for me.

I did not know these fine men before, however; as difficult and sad as the circumstances were It was the beginning of something special and wonderful in my life. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I was taught the gospel by President T. Bowring Woodbury of the Central States Mission, Wichita, Kansas. I was baptized a few months later, in 1958.in Wichita, Kansas. I love the Gospel!

I filed for early release in order to attend Brigham Young University. I wanted to attend the fall semester. It was granted early release and we were able to come back to Lehi in late summer of 1959 .

I entered B.Y.U and graduated three years later. I taught in Murray Jr. High School and also worked on my Masters degree, which I received in 1968 from B.Y.U. in History, Industrial Education and Administration.

As I mentioned before President Woodbury taught me the gospel, the plan of Salvation. I knew it was true and I have been faithful and carried a position in the church since that time. I have served in most positions in the ward, including Bishop. I, along with my wife have served a part time mission in the Central States Mission, 5 years at the Missionary Training Center, served on the temple committee for the Mount Timpanogos Temple during the construction, helping with the organization for the open house - tours. We were asked if we would like to take the first group through the temple. It was a marvelous experience and blessing, what an opportunity. We work on our genealogy. We have served a mission in Ireland, and served as a mission couple for the seminary. We served in the temple for a few years and continue to serve where we are asked. Our five daughters have been married to good men in the temple and raising children in the gospel. What more can we ask for?